clarion
FREEDOM • DEMOCRACY • HUMANITY

FEATURES / LIFE

Meet Shafique ul Hasan, A Crusader Against Fake News

By: Theclarionindia
June 24, 2022

Shafique ul Hasan, a man of determination and passion, has completed five years of his dedicated and self-less service of providing news clipping of authentic stories based on merit and relevance to thousands of people on daily basis.

Dr Abhay Kumar | Clarion India

“Reading newspapers is an art,” said journalist Shafique ul Hasan during a tête-à-tête with me at his office in Sarai Jullena area near the historic Jamia Millia Islamiain New Delhi. His statement reminded me of a similar statement made by eminent writer and activist Arundhati Roy a long time back.

I could vividly remember the day we were coming out of a seminar hall located near ITO, New Delhi. Arundhati Roy, the author who won Booker prize for her novel The God of Small Things, gave us a lift in her car when we were returning home from the seminar.

Sitting in the car, we discussed several topics. One of them was the media on which she spoke in detail. “We all buy newspapers and read them but not all of us have the proper training to read them,” she made this statement while sitting on the front seat of the car.

Similar to Arundhati Roy’s concern, Shafique Bhai was speaking about the art of reading newspapers: “Selection of news and views is very important. Many items published in newspapers are fake news. They are propagated to serve a particular interest. Paid news, as well as fake news, have caused a lot of damage to the fabric of society. They are detrimental to the interests of the people. That’s why we need to develop a habit of reading authentic news as well as discarding fake news.”

He was discussing with me on how he got the idea of sending the news clippings every morning to thousands of people. Our discussion also diverted to the wider topic of the role of the media and the challenges before the nation.

Fifty-year-old Shafique Bhai is a senior journalist. Earlier, he has contributed his articles to Hindi daily, Amar Ujala (Agra edition) and Urdu newspaper Akhbar-E-Nau. During the discussion, he looked very concerned about the state of the media today. But he did not put all the blame on the media houses. Instead, he held the people partially responsible. “The media publishes and telecasts sensational stories because they are liked by readers and viewers. If people stop reading and watching such stories, the media houses will think thousands of times before publishing fake and anti-people content. But why do people watch such content which promotes hatred,” Shafiq Bhai asked.

On the co
function is
the role of the media' is the theme of discussion. Senior journalists, scholars and civil society members are likely to participate. Prof. Akhtarul Wasey, Dr. Syed Farooque, Ahmad Jawed, Azim Akhtar, Anjum Naim, A.U. Asif, Zia us Salam, Dr. Muzaffar Hussain Ghazali, Dr. Shoaib Raza Fatmi, Syed Zubair Ahmad, A.N. Shibli, Zubair Khan Sayidi, Ashraf Bastavi, Er. Khalid Rasheed Alig are some of the prominent personalities who will participate in the function.

Shafique ul Hasan launched his service of sending newspaper clippings to his friends and through WhatsApp broadcast groups on June 24, 2017. The unique feature of his service is that he has been completing his work every morning without fail for the last five years. Even if he is preoccupied with business work or traveling abroad or even has fallen sick, he has not broken the chain of delivering news clippings. On average, he spends around 25 stories, selected from over a dozen newspapers published in English, Hindi and Urdu. The same number of e-newspapers is also consulted by him. In his mission, he has not taken the assistance of anyone. His only colleagues in this work are his determination and passion. He calls it a junoon (passion). “I have never sought the help of anyone in news clippings service. My mobile phone, my newspapers and myself are partners in this endeavour”.

Punctuality and precision are other names of Shafique Bhai. Every day he gets up early in the morning before six. For ten to fifteen minutes he takes a walk before taking up his passionate work. He first reads a dozen of leading newspapers on the internet. Then, the hawker delivers around a dozen newspapers. He reads them and then begins selecting important stories.

His work requires both selection and exclusion. First, he selects around 100 stories and then compares them purely based on their merit and decides the final 25 for circulation.

“While selecting the stories, I look for the authenticity of stories, merit and relevance. Never have I ever selected any story or opinion piece because the author is close to me or the writer belongs to a particular caste, religion, sect, political organisation, etc. In the last five years, I have never circulated a single fake story. Nor has my work ever created any controversy. I have professionally done all my work”, Shafique Bhai revealed to me the secret behind the selection of news clippings. Reading newspapers, making a selection, scanning them in proper light and angle, and compressing them for better traffic on WhatsApp requires hard work, dedication and knowledge of technology. Shafique Bhai has professionally done his job.

Indeed, the selection of news is not an easy thing to do. Nor is everybody capable of deciding what constitutes news. This question has taken me back to my student days when a similar question was asked ‘What is news?’ It was among the first questions we were asked in our first class at the Indian Institute of Mass Communication, New Delhi more than one and half decades back. Based on my experience of over a two-decade-long journey in journalism, I can tell you that deciding what constitutes news is the most fundamental job of a journalist. Let me give you a few examples.

If the Prime Minister goes to offer pooja, most of our news channels cover it live, while the issues of farmers, workers, marginalised sections, students, unemployed youths, etc. are ignored or downplayed. Is covering the religious activity of a person who is sitting on a Constitutional post in a secular democracy more important than covering people’s issues? Similarly, if a celebrity catches a cold, it gets wider coverage than the poor children who die of fever in remote areas. Is it ethical journalism?

The selection of news by the editor in the newsroom has become an ideological and political act. For example, while the so-called hurt sentiments of majority communities are covered prominently, the

of the cow
the prices
government reduces a small fraction of the amount increased, it becomes a piece of national news and the media starts congratulating one supreme leader.
In this context, the question asked in my journalism class and the concern of Arundhati Roy has become very important.

What is news? The selection of news items and the space and time allocation to them in newspapers and TV screens are very critical. If you consider these concerns, you can appreciate the role of Shafique Bhai. To be honest, I have come to know him very recently. I met him for the first time on March 30 during the bicentenary celebration of Urdu journalism held at India Islamic Cultural Centre, New Delhi.

But within a short period, I have come to know a lot about Shafique Bhai's life and mission. He hails from Ganjdundwara Qasba, Kasganj, in Uttar Pradesh. His father, Zuhur Saheb, is a social worker. He studied till his matriculation at his home. Later, he moved to Delhi, where he completed his intermediate from Uttar Pradesh Board. At IGNOU and Jamia Millia Islamia, he did his graduation and post-graduation (Political Science), respectively. As mentioned above, he spent some time with newspapers but later shifted to the field of advertisement, printing and publishing. At present, he heads an advertisement office from Sarai Jullena. Even after shifting his focus to the advertisement, he was never isolated from the world of the media. Through social media platforms, he used to share relevant news stories and opinion pieces.

But what inspired him to take up the task of sending news clippings every morning to thousands of people who are connected to him. It is an interesting story. Two events occurred in 2016 and 2017 that changed his life. The first was a crisis in the family. His wife was seriously ill. The apprehension of losing his life partner disturbed him day and night. But almost a miracle happened and she recovered. Later, he saw the picture of 17-year-old Junaid, who was killed in 2017. The brutal murder of Junaid disturbed Shafique Bhai a lot. As he recalled, "It was very disturbing for me. Earlier also Muslims were targeted and in the mob-lynching several Muslims lost their lives. But the murder of Junaid broke me down. I was not able to accept the fact that society had become so brutal that it had not even spared a child. On that day, I realised that I should do something for waging a war against the prevalent atmosphere of hatred. What I could do was to start sending a bunch of authentic news clippings to my friends. The idea was to help my friends and the larger public to develop a habit of reading a true story and differentiate it from fake ones and those all stories promoting hatred. Another inspiration for the initiative was the recovery of my wife. Since I got a second life, thanks to the Almighty, I decided to dedicate my life to the service of humanity," said Shafique Bhai.

He lives with his family in Sarita Vihar, New Delhi. From his home, he has been working on a mission. Many people have praised his mission of being "free from self-interest and profit". They have called it a pure act of social service for the values of our Constitution, equality, liberty, secularism, peace and harmony.

Believe me, when I wake up in the morning and open my mobile phone, his news clippings are already delivered. Without any fail, Shafique Bhai does his work. As a journalist, when I see Shafique Bhai's selection, I get amazed. His selection of news items and opinion pieces is excellent. Most news editors working in the mainstream media do not have such a nose for news. I wish the editors of mainstream newspapers and TV channels could learn from his vision and activities. Over this period, my admiration for Shafique Bhai has increased.

As Shafique Bhai continues to do social service and bring to us the most authentic and credible stories which have a larger public concern every morning, the number of his admirers and friends has

personal
following

most turbulent era of journalism. This is the age of alternative facts and fake news! The need of the hour is to be on a 'News Diet'! But Shafique is the one person on whom I rely because he has an eye to see the difference between fiction and fact. He brings 'truth' which has become the rarest commodity".

Prof. Akhtarul Wasey, former head of department, Islamic Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia praised his contribution: "This selfless, voluntary service is admirable. A passion for which you will be known with love, respect and affection". Meem Afzal, former Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha), recognised his service in these words. "You have a good habit of doing things nicely with new ideas accompanied by full devotion. This is a noble service which you are doing without any economic interest". Sirajuddin Qureshi, president of India Islamic Cultural Centre, wrote about him: "Very brave and courageous effort, selfless dedication to your society. You have etched your name in the annals of history".

During my interaction with him, I found him very friendly. A man with tall stature does not keep a tall ego. He is down-to-earth and he greets his friends with a smile. When I asked him, "Shafique Bhai, I want to interview you". He readily accepted my request and said, "Come to my place, any day we will do". The best thing about him is that his mission does not propagate any particular interest. Nor does he act in promoting any political party or personality. He believes in a cause. His cause is the dissemination of authentic and credible news stories and critical opinion pieces. If he has any "motive" in his heart, it is the welfare of people and harmony in society.

What is his next plan? Replying to this query, he says that he is considering taking a break after the completion of the five years of news clippings service. "Health and business are now my biggest priority and I am planning to take a break. Later I will decide what more and how better I can do the same thing". But does it not break the cycle? To this, his answer is 'no'. "I cannot alone do everything. As an individual, I have my limitations. We need thousands of people like me in every part of the country. They should take up the task of disseminating authentic news and help fight the atmosphere of hatred". He also does not think that sending news clippings to a select group of people through WhatsApp negatively affects the business of the newspapers. "By sending news clippings I do not negatively affect the circulation of the newspapers. I do not send the whole newspaper. I spend hours going through dozens of newspapers and making a selection. That selection involves a lot of hard work. This selection becomes a unique creation", said Shafique Bhai.

Our discussion went on for a couple of hours. Meanwhile, the office attendant came to us and interrupted our discussion. "Sir, we need to close the office". We realised that it was late as the sky outside the window was filled with darkness. From his fourth-floor office, we got down the stairs. While returning, I was thinking about what I could do for him for his selfless service. Indeed, an ordinary and resourceless person like me has nothing to offer to him, except for writing my experience about this passionate journalist and sharing it with you. In the end, I congratulate him on his great success and wish him good health and a successful business ahead. I am looking forward to attending his felicitation function in Jamia Nagar as a token of gratitude to him.

Dr Abhay Kumar is a Delhi-based independent journalist and writer. He did his Ph.D. (Modern History) at Jawaharlal Nehru University. He also teaches Political Science and Urdu. His broad areas of interest include Minority Rights and Social Justice. You may write to him at debatingissues@gmail.com.

Shafique News Service: Shafique ul Hasan earned laurels for his unique services in the field of journalism.